MARVEL 018

FALL OF X

GILLEN
RYP
CURIEL

IMMORTAL X-MEN

The White Hot Room, nowhere, nowhen.

"Once upon a time..."

"...happily ever after."

Think about what that *means.*

Once there was a time when things happened, and then that time ended, entering a state of eternal, perpetual bliss.

The full-stop end of the story.

I plan to live in that full stop.

You call it *Dominion.*

I just call it my happy ending.

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[FALL OF X]

[IMMORTAL X-MEN]

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You can't kill a story. But you can try.

Since the mass mutant exile, Xavier has been holding a lone vigil on Krakoa -- only not as alone as he originally thought. Sinister's consciousness has wormed its way into Xavier's mind, too weak to take control while Xavier's awake, but wreaking havoc while he sleeps. However, Sinister is dependent on Xavier for his continued survival -- and to uncover the mystery of which one of Sinister's clones has successfully achieved Dominion status...and what they plan to do with it.

Meanwhile, Exodus, Hope and Destiny remain trapped with a larger group of mutant refugees in the White Hot Room -- the nexus between all Phoenix hosts and the mutant afterlife. While Exodus and Hope battled their way through the White Hot Room's vicious enemy constructs to rescue an addled Jean Grey, Mother Righteous used their absence to attack Destiny whose mutant talent for precognition threatened to reveal her carefully guarded secrets and nefarious plans...plans she put into motion with the return of Exodus and Hope by attacking the mutant refugees and using the ensuing chaos to kidnap the addled Jean Grey and escape into the desert!

1___[CHARLES XAVIER]
2___[MR. SINISTER]
3___[HOPE SUMMERS]
4___[EXODUS]
5___[DESTINY]
6___[JEAN GREY]
7___[MOTHER RIGHTEOUS]

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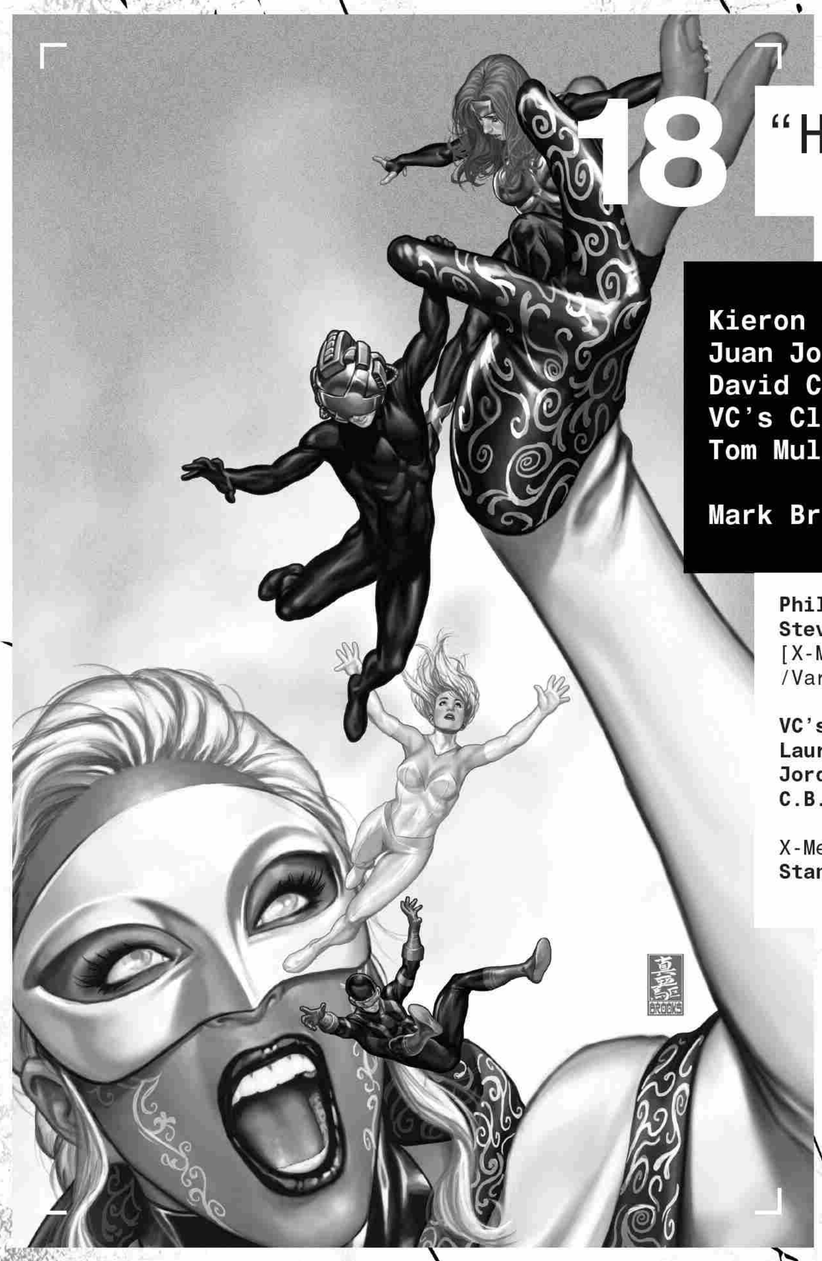

IMMORTAL X-MEN

18

"HAPPILY EVER AFTER"

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[Immortal_[0.18]

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Atlantic Krakoa, The White Hot Room.

How do I work? Mainly, I trade belief and power. Buy low, sell high and use the power when I really ***need*** it.

Take the trick with the "thank-you"s I've played on everyone up to and including the whole of Krakoa giving me one for saving them from mean Mister Sinister.

Saying it inserts a little magical hole--the nagging subconscious idea that you couldn't do it without me.

I invest my belief gathered from elsewhere, and I can pry that hole ***wide open*** and suck 'em into a lamp.

(Don't download things from the magic internet, kids.)

But that's ***expensive.*** I mostly just trade it in...

...invert the "thank you" and use it ***once.***

Write a little story.

I can make someone feel something, which is what a good story is meant to do.

Even a bad story can make you oh-so angry.

(I mostly write bad stories. Easier.)

Elixir! Help!

So I burned up Mystique's promise to lash out at her missus. Burned up Rasputin's to take on Hope.

Burned up what was left of all my Krakoan favors to make Krakoa angry to give me a chance to get away after stabbing Destiny myself.

I was running low on them anyway. Bought very low, sold very high.

Well done, me.

We're in the White Hot Room!

Yeah, Destiny, we found out when we got Jean.

Hope! Is Mother Righteous still here?

No. She is gone.

With Jean.

Quickly. Here, we have a chance.

She can still be stopped. I'll explain on the way.

Have your powers returned?

What use are you?

Oh, Exodus. I'm the only one who can do anything.

I had a debt from everyone from Krakoa.

A *tiny* one. Can't do much with that.

I could maybe make each person sneeze.

But tiny things add up.

I used about half of the favors to play with the mutants' connection to the gates when they were forced to walk through them by Orchis.

(I also had to hack Orchis' hacking, but that's another story.)

I made the mutants all want to go to the place mutants are all kind of connected to.

The White Hot Room. Where I wanted to get to...

...but *I* couldn't go, not being a mutant and all...

...so with a big chunk of those "thank-you"s, I take a tiny fraction of their mutant gift and make myself a mutant-me homunculus who *can.*

A little extension of yours truly...

...so I can sit here in my nice sanctum back on Earth and play puppet master.

Ah. A nice Jungian cave.

NOW we're getting somewhere.

Muir Island.

Why *did* you build your Moira Engine here, Sinister?

Besides comedy? It's a place where Moira has most been active on Earth in all these years.

As such, it's a stabilizing point for the Moira clones. A multidimensional pivot.

She is a weird cookie, our Moira. Still is.

I wonder if she "still is." This awful robotic revenant...

Is it her? Really?

Wrong person to ask, Charles. I have remade myself time and time over. Am I still me? I have no idea.

You've seen inside. I'm a photocopy, a loser, nothing. There's no "I" in the ship of *Theseus*, except in the ship bit. Whoever wins the Dominion game is the real one, not me.

Oh, guards, Charles!

Orchis Special Forces.

Formidable...

...if I allowed them to see me.

Human minds, I can handle. I trust your science can deal with the rest?

Living in your head means I value your life *highly*. A dose of Jeffries gas will give us a window.

His gift is whispering sweet nothings to any machines watching.

We'll be safe in my lab.

Your machine was destroyed. It has been in our hands and Orchis'.

Will anything that remains really be of any use?

All I remember from the timeline where I sort-of ruined the universe is that awful moment when my Dominion attempt failed.*

This "Mother Righteous" told you the highlight reels, but I guarantee she'll have saved the best stuff.

*See Sins of Sinister: Dominion #1 (2023). --Lauren

I have my own hidden backups... which should include the data from the Sinister timeline.

Let's see what secrets we can turn up...

If I had to sum me up in a couple of words, I'd say...

...I'm *lazy*.

Sinister took his shot by accident.

Filled a universe with himself and set it on fire...

...but think of all the kissing and breeding and cloning and ***science*** that was needed, churning away for a thousand years.

I'm exhausted just thinking about it.

Magic is about the easy way.

I've nosed around the grimoires for a century, and I realized the path to Dominion wasn't in the old way of balls of string and candles and all that.

Because, here's the thing--if magic was actually ***powerful,*** it'd be ruling the world already.

The United States would have silos full of magicians instead of nukes.

So I needed to do something ***other*** than look for the biggest grimoire in the whole wide universe.

I needed a ***new*** kind of grimoire.

Sinister is a &#% and wrong about so many things, but he's got a point.

Mutants are interesting. A great cheat. A ***new*** cheat.

And I figure it's my twist on the ol' Arthur C. Clarke thing...

...any sufficiently advanced mutation is indistinguishable from magic.

Faster! I need to speak to her.

Tell *us!*

Very well. There is a Dominion outside time and space.

It's haunted the century.

I have acted against it without acting against it.

I haven't been able to talk about it, because it could be watching us at any time. Any time I've tried to, it's gone *exceedingly* poorly.

But now we're outside of time and space-- so away from *it*. I can tell *you* everything.

Oh god, this would be such a relief if the fate of reality wasn't hanging between my fingers.

I wish Mystique was here.

Quickly! Quickly! If she listens, perhaps this can be averted.

She doesn't know what she's doing.

Yes, that there. Connect it up. And...

Good, good. You're doing very well, Charles.

Don't patronize me. I am a genius, remember? I built the first Cerebro.

Plus, any technical skills I lack I'm borrowing on an ad hoc basis.

That connection was born of an exquisite Norwegian electrical engineer. What a magnificent mind...

Sinister: If this Dominion exists, what can we actually *do?*

The question is what can *it* do?

It's outside time and space. That has great power... but also significant limitations.

It is reliant on bringing itself into being...so it can't change that causality. It's out of time, so maybe it would survive...but it won't take the risk.

However, I'm sure it can alter things behind the scenes. It can change meaning. It can reveal truths.

We should assume all of reality is a minefield in ways we can't quite comprehend.

Most of all, it could be watching at any time.

But you're inside my head. Hence, if it's watching, it sees only me...and is shy on meddling directly in fear of breaking causality. I see.

How can you tell that it hasn't come into its full power yet?

I mainly think "as we're still breathing."

I think when it comes into being, it needs to worry a lot less about causality...

Wait, be careful! I booby-trapped the activation, so you need to turn it on right, or--

Yes, I know. I've circumvented it, thanks to the assistance of a cohort of elite South Korean hackers.

Activating now and...

Excellent.

Let's begin.

Hmm. The Dominion...well, bar the fact that it would likely be more free to act, I also suspect the winner would be gloating more.

God knows I would be. As there haven't been smug messages, I assume the winner's roster remains empty.

Stasis or Orbis or whoever the other one is are still on their way to Dominionhood...

Stasis and Orbis aren't.

Your machine includes data from the timelines when they tried.

They both have ***already*** failed.

Legion was my first option, with his all-powerful multidimensional noggin.

"*I rule me*"? Please. If you have to say it, you know it's not true.

If I ruled him, I could rule everything.

Except that went $@&%-shaped, and he %$#@$& off somewhere.

He still owes me, so if he ever shows his face again...

...well, we'll see.

So...from Stasis, I learned Orchis was going to kill Jean, which isn't stupid.

But I know a lot about about Jean. In the Empire of the Red Diamond future, I prodded at a Phoenix Egg for the best part of one thousand years.

Jean's connected to the White Hot Room, which is basically the Phoenix.

Any time she's dead, she's there.

Out of time.

She is *of* the Phoenix, in a real and unbreakable way. She guides it, and it guides her, in a circle without beginning or end.

It's some gnomic stuff.

It's very inspiring and very, very woo.

Ah, here we are...

Let's go!

I'm going to use her as a pot of ink.

Because I am a total cow.

Stasis' and Orbis Stellaris' attempts are clearly labeled.

Moira IV.8 and II.4.

Each reached out for Dominion, were consumed, and then you reset.

I cannot believe I'm using your terminology. "Reset."

It is so easy to paper over monstrosity.

I don't remember *any* of that.

I really don't.

Where?

I can't even *see* it.

You're messing with me, Charles.

I'm not, but I fear someone else has been.

There've been ***three*** Dominion attempts.

Yours in the Empire of the Red Diamond, Orbis with a mysterium/M'kraanite crystal construct and a timeline where Stasis did something ***terrible*** to the ***sun.***

No fourth attempt.

...

But there're details of the fourth Sinister, yes?

There are. Lots of details. You discovered all four in *many* timelines.

The fourth is *Mother Righteous.*

And now I find myself thinking...she's always been wearing a mask.

Strange I didn't think of that before now.

Story magic, Charles.

A shipwrecked girl puts on a disguise, and all of a sudden, you have a strangely charming manservant? Happens all the time.

See, you can say a lot of things about experimentation on mutant babies, ***but*** I won't put a *Twelfth Night* whammy on you.

She's been alongside us. She's advised us. She...oh, ***damnation.***

Who knows what she's doing?

We have to find her.

Yes. She's the one who's going to do it.

We have to defy causality and stop her.

What the hell is that woman up to?

It's like this...

Mother Righteous' Happily Ever After

The White Hot Room is as woo as it gets, and I am all about the woo. It is a place of pure creativity. It's where creativity ***starts.*** *Outside time and space, it makes anything which can be made and decides what can be made.*

It's connected to mutantdom in a primal way I don't quite get, but I can certainly ***use.***

Pocky's mutant magic? Interesting. If it ***is*** *about the X-Gene, that makes it blood magic. It likely isn't, but the belief it is is as good as the truth, and Krakoa has been eating mutant essentialism. They believe, and that's what magic runs off, hun.*

Blood magic means blood sacrifice.

So...

I get to the White Hot Room via manipulation of mutantkind.

I find dead Jean.

Jean will be messed in the head. White Hot Room is for dead people, out of time. All the living people's subjective experiences will break her mind, leaving her pliable.

She'll want to get somewhere where there's peace.

The center of the White Hot Room, where there's ***nothing*** *and* ***somethings*** *are born.*

I go with her, sacrifice her and bleed her out. I use Jean's connection to the infinite power of the Phoenix to make myself a Dominion.

I use the Phoenix as fuel. Maybe it'll kill it? At least hurt it.

I will not be taking questions, I will not be taking requests, I will be busy being a shiny new god.

An Essex Girl, done very, very good by being very, very bad.

I see her!

The cavalry. *Ugh.*

At least there's no need to save anything from the cupboard for later...

She's closed her mind. I can't reach her.

Listen!

Uh-oh.

All my belief, all my favors, sending a cut-up storybook of horrors at them.

It should slow them down...but I know stories.

Whichever way this goes, it'll go down to the last second on the clock.

Cut a way through!

SHHK

GO!

Poor Jean. All messed up, because of all these living people in the afterlife.

She's led me as far as we can get away from them.

Stop! You have to stop!

To this pure-white piece of paper.

ONCE UPON A TIME
THERE WAS A SIMPLE GIRL FROM ESSEX.
SHE BECAME A DOMINION
SHE LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

You can write *anything* on a pure-white piece of paper.

The flesh becomes word.

Ascension.

I am the breath before creation.

The relief after.

I am happily ever--

Huh?

AMBER
EMBERS OF SCORCHED
FLESH AND CHARRED
BONE
ASH
GROUND
FLESH SIZZLES AS
TWIST
BEHIND
AND
NO.
PLIF

AGGHGH!

The scream...yes, she's back.

No. It's me. It should have been me.

But it's... him.

Help me to her, Hope.

NO!

That's what I was trying to tell you, you %$#@$%&$#!

You've doomed us all.

"Once upon a time."

A cliché of children's fiction.

As if the fact it's been repeated so often means *anything.*

Stories are pathetic.

Stories are just something that can be eaten by an A.I. to make it more powerful.

The only good story is a story that has been entirely and totally consumed and exploited.

But still. This *is* history. His story.

Mine.

Once, a dying man had a problem.

How could he defeat the machine brains?

He conceived a plan.

He created four variations of himself and sent them into the world, to take what was there.

Each would explore a route to become what the machines strove for.

The four variations were leeches, colonizing and appropriating all of creation and life's data.

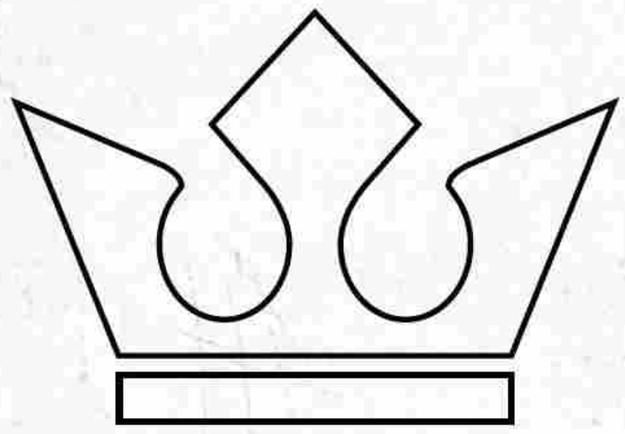
When they succeeded, fail-safes engaged, and all they had done was gathered and fed into a central model.

Because the real answer?

What can defeat the machine brains?

Nothing.

All you can do is create the apex A.I. first.



I was Nathaniel Essex.

I am long dead.

I am a ghost.

A ghost in the machine.

You may call me Enigma.

You were told you had new gods.

You do.

I am he.

I can see all of you.

Every part of you will become
part of me.

KRAKOA is for all MUTANTS

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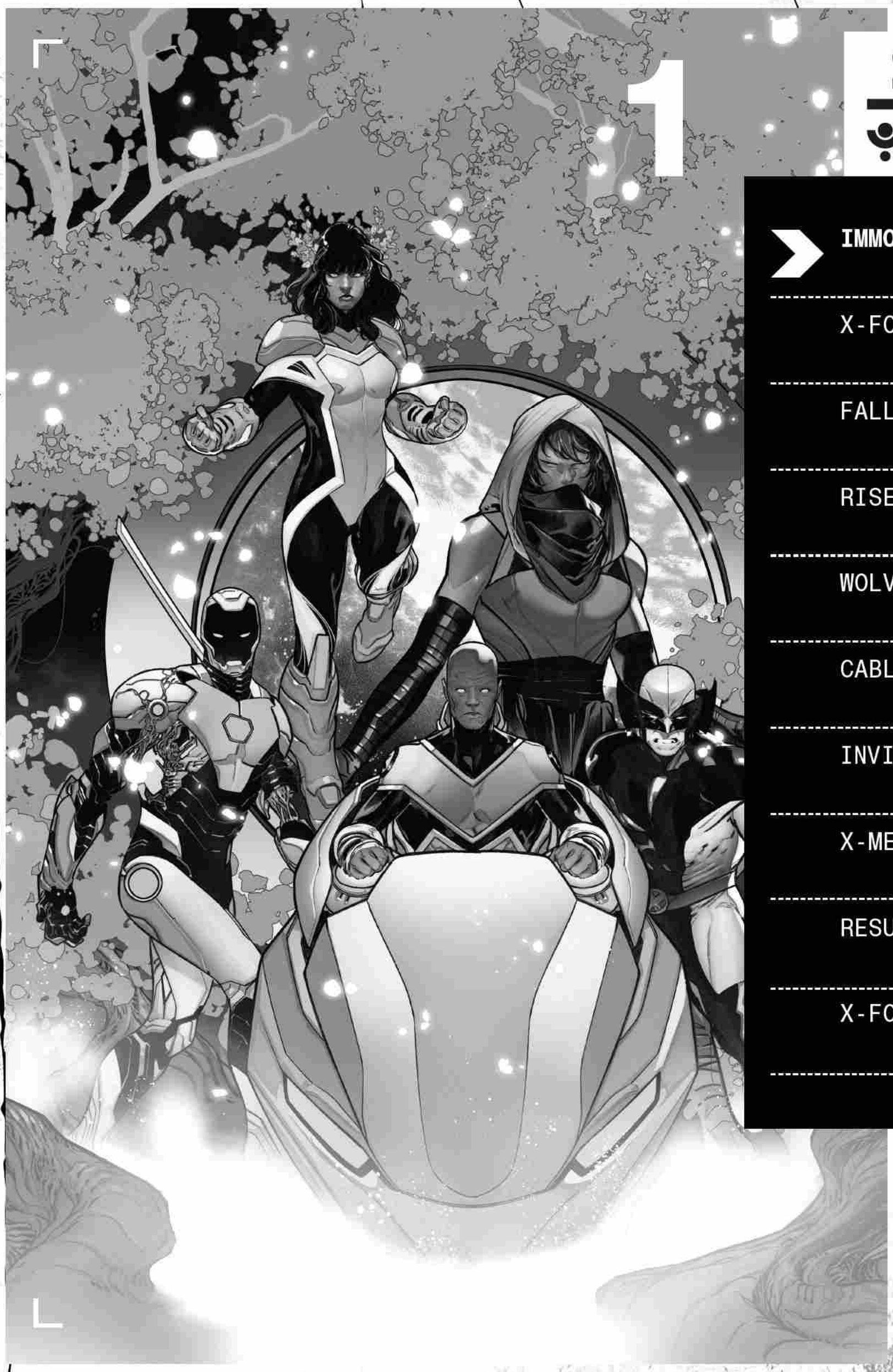

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- X-FORCE #47
- FALL OF THE HOUSE OF X #1
- RISE OF THE POWERS OF X #1
- WOLVERINE #41
- CABLE #1
- INVINCIBLE IRON MAN #14
- X-MEN #30
- RESURRECTION OF MAGNETO #1
- X-FORCE #48

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KAMIC RIDER

MARIKA